



Rev Helen Jacobi

Wisdom

Year C Trinity

Proverbs 8:1-4,22-31

John 16:12-15

12 June 2022

On the front cover of our order of service today is the icon of the Trinity by Rublev from the 15th century; copied ever since by icon writers. It depicts the story from Genesis where Abraham offers hospitality to three mysterious visitors – the three angels are interpreted to mean God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are identical but different and talk together as they receive Abraham and Sarah’s hospitality.

In the icon exhibition which is on at the art gallery at the moment there is another icon showing Sophia, Holy Wisdom. She is dressed in Byzantine courtly dress, with angel wings and a crown. This representation is also a common imagery in icons.

When looking at an icon we are invited to see through them and into the souls of the saints they depict, to enter into the story, to venerate the figures as we worship.

The doctrine of the Trinity (where God is three in one and one in three) can also be an icon that invites us in.

I think usually we think of the Trinity as a complicated puzzle we feel we should understand; something drawn up for us by the theologians of the fourth century to bother us ever after.

We have a baptism today and in talking with baptism families I always say that the words of the baptism service can sound a bit boxy – “I believe in God the Father, maker and sustainer of all things; and in God the Son, my Saviour Jesus Christ, and in God the Holy Spirit, giver of life and truth” – but rather than thinking of the words as a closed box, we can think of them as an open container to help hold our beliefs and questions. An open container – like the symbol on our banner and robes. Or an icon we look through seeking the presence of God.

Like Jesus says to the disciples in John’s gospel “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit comes, he will guide you.” Faith is not a formula or a doctrine but a journey into the mystery of God.

Our reading from the Book of Proverbs really helps us with that journey. Wisdom here is personified as a woman and she calls to us “on the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads, beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals.”

Wisdom is not found locked away in a book, or a library, or a temple, or a special holy place. Wisdom is found in the public places where the people gather.

One writer, Jeff Paschal puts it like this

“I was out shopping yesterday, and whom did I run into? Wisdom. Yeah, there she was. She called me over and we began talking. Wisdom and I.

Then, I went down to the courthouse, and there she was again, make a plea for justice in some dingy courtroom where somebody had been unjustly accused. After that, I dropped by the school, and she had gotten there ahead of me, calling for students and teachers alike to seek truth.”¹

¹ Jeff Paschal, in Feasting on the Word Year C Volume 3, p29-31

Wisdom is the presence of God, found in our ordinary everyday lives and ordinary everyday places.

Wisdom is not special or closed off or formulaic but amongst us all the time.

And the writer of Proverbs says Wisdom has been there since creation itself:

Jeff Paschal's story continues:

“Then I went for a walk in the bush, moving along the track in quiet meditation. Wisdom snuck up on me and said, “Now that we are alone, I have something I want to share with you, a present for you to enjoy. You know, I have been around a long time, really before the beginning of time. I have been whirling and dancing with God all along. I am God’s delight, laughing and playing. I want you to know the lightness of spirit and gladness that come when you welcome me. Will you set aside those thoughts, words, deeds that make life heavy and sad for you and others? Will you come and laugh and play with me? Will you come and dance with me? Will you?”²

This sense of wisdom being part of creation is where the Trinitarian theologians pick up wisdom, who in turn becomes the Greek logos, or the Word from the beginning of John’s gospel – “in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God” – and John is talking about Jesus.

So if you can follow that trajectory – wisdom/ creation – logos/ the word – Jesus – you can see why this passage gets chosen for Trinity Sunday.

But I think it is much better to stay in the world of the writer of Proverbs (or the editor) rather than get bogged down in doctrine.

² ibid

Because in the world of Proverbs wisdom is ever present, ever dynamic, ever positive, ever joyful and is found in us and the world.

The last line of our reading “I (wisdom) was daily God’s delight, rejoicing before God always, rejoicing in God’s inhabited world and delighting in the human race.”

Delighting in the human race – God delights in us, rejoices with us.

Maybe that is why the Sophia/ wisdom icon is dressed in courtly dress, ready for a celebration.

So can we delight today in a God who loves us and who comes to us in many images and many ideas – Father, Mother, Son, Wisdom, Spirit, Breath.

Can we look for God’s presence on the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads; wherever we are.

Can we trust that God’s goodness and God’s wisdom is woven into our very souls.

And can we trust that others will delight in seeing God within us, like looking at an icon of the divine.